



Baptist Bottoms Acquisition Project

Full Mitigation Best Practice Story

Geneva County, Alabama

Geneva, AL - At the end of a week of rain and flooding in March 1990, about 6,000 people in Alabama had lost their homes or had seen their property damaged. Hundreds more had to seek shelter in neighboring Georgia and the Florida panhandle. Estimated damages throughout the State were at more than \$100 million. The hardship was summed up at the time by Alabama Governor Guy Hunt: "A lifetime of hard work for some disappeared into the raging floodwaters. A lot of our people have never witnessed such devastation from floods before."



Four years later, in early June 1994, Tropical Storm Alberto moved slowly inland, leaving a trail of flooding and destruction along the Pea and Choctawhatchee Rivers. Small towns along these waterways were hit particularly hard.

In the aftermath of the 1994 flood, the Town of Geneva officials developed a model hazard mitigation project. They began an aggressive campaign to convince homeowners in the flood-prone Baptist Bottoms area to sell their homes and relocate out of the floodplain. Eventually, they submitted a grant application to FEMA for the acquisition of 54 homes. FEMA agreed to fund the buyout of dozens of buildings within the floodway of Double Bridges Creek in Baptist Bottoms.

In the first week of March 1998, a heavy storm system from the Gulf of Mexico moved inland across the southeastern United States. Torrential rains swept through the region and caused serious flooding in several Alabama counties. The flooding not only damaged hundreds of homes and businesses, it also took a serious toll on infrastructure: several bridges and culverts were overwhelmed, roads were washed out, emergency services were delayed, and water treatment facilities were damaged.

The buyout of 30 homes (actual number acquired prior to the spring of 1998 floods) after the 1994 flood proved to be an effective investment in Geneva. FEMA's benefit-cost analysis determined that for an upfront cost of approximately \$672,000 to acquire flood-prone properties, over \$1.4 million in damages and losses were avoided. All of the acquired properties lay deep in the floodplain, and would have been flooded had they remained. If these buildings had merely been repaired after the 1994 flood, many would have been severely damaged or destroyed in 1998.

This illustration of avoided damages emphasizes a very important point for hazard mitigation planning: the biggest benefits come from acquiring structures at highest risk--that is, buildings that are deepest in the floodplain.

Activity/Project Location

Geographical Area: **Single County in a State**

FEMA Region: **Region IV**

State: **Alabama**

County: **Geneva County**

City/Community: **Geneva**

Key Activity/Project Information

Sector: **Public**
Hazard Type: **Flooding; Hurricane/Tropical Storm**
Activity/Project Type: **Acquisition/Buyouts**
Structure Type: **Wood Frame**
Activity/Project Start Date: **07/1994**
Activity/Project End Date: **03/1998**
Funding Source: **Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)**
Funding Recipient: **Local Government**
Funding Recipient Name: **City of Geneva**

Activity/Project Economic Analysis

Cost: **\$672,558.00 (Estimated)**

Activity/Project Disaster Information

Mitigation Resulted From Federal
Disaster? **Yes**
Federal Disaster #: **1034 , 07/08/1994**
Value Tested By Disaster? **Yes**
Tested By Federal Disaster #: **No Federal Disaster specified**
Year First Tested: **1999**
Repetitive Loss Property? **Unknown**

Reference URLs

Reference URL 1: **<http://www.floodsmart.gov/>**
Reference URL 2: **<http://ema.alabama.gov/>**

Main Points

- In the aftermath of the 1994 flood, the Town of Geneva officials began an aggressive campaign to convince homeowners to sell their homes and relocate out of the floodplain.
- The buyout of 30 homes (actual number acquired prior to the spring of 1998 floods) after the 1994 flood proved to be an effective investment in Geneva. FEMA's benefit-cost analysis determined that for an upfront cost of approximately \$672,000 to acquire flood-prone properties, over \$1.4 million in damages and losses were avoided.
- All of the acquired structures lay deep in the floodplain, and would have been flooded had they remained in the flood-risk zone. If these buildings had merely been repaired after the 1994 flood, many would have been severely damaged or destroyed in 1998.